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THE

LEGEND

OF

SAINT ROBERT,

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Hermit of Knaresbro'.



KNARESBRO',

PRINTED IN THE YEAR 1792.

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The Hermit of Knarebro'.

ST. Robert was born in the city of York, his father's name was Tocklese Floure, and his mother's Smimeria; who, being of the best rank of citizens, and following a most Christian rule of good life, had a son whom they named Robert, and brought him up in all virtuous education; and as he grew in years of discretion, so they trained him up in learning and virtuous exercises. This holy man, even from his infancy, had a continual recourse to godly prayer, never once stooping to the love of pleasures, but still increasing in holiness, was at length made Sub-deacon.

Not long after this, Robert went into the North parts of the country and betook himself to a certain house called the New Monastery of the Cistercian order, where he had a brother of that order; there he remained some four months, giving them a true pattern of sobriety and good life, and then he returned to his father's house. After a few days, this servant of God privately fled from his parents to Knareborough, as God had inspired him, to an hermit there, leading a strict life amongst the rocks; who seemed at first glad of such an associate as Robert, but afterwards being overcome by the temptation of our common enemy the devil, he returned again to his wife and children, and left Robert alone, who with wonderful abstinence afflicted himself.

After this Robert went to a certain matron, not far from his cell, to ask an alms, who gave him as much ground, with the Chapel of St. Hilda, as he thought good to dig and till: This alms Robert accepted of, and remained there almost a year, chastising his flesh with austere mortifications, and applying himself

wholly to the service of God. A little before he departed thence thieves broke into his cell and took all his provision away, and upon that he determined to leave the place, and went to Spofforth, where he stayed for a while, attending only to prayer and other services of God Almighty. The fame of his sanctity and holy conversation caused most of the country to come flocking to him, but for avoiding of applause (the holy man always rejecting vain-glory) he secretly departed and changed his abode.

No sooner had the Monks of Adley heard of Robert's retiring from Spofforth but they were earnest with him to come and live among them, which the good man did, and became a poor brother of their house, and submitted himself to their spiritual rules and discipline: As for his garment it was only one, and that of white colour, which served rather to cover his nakedness than to keep him warm. His bread was three parts barley-meal, his broth was made of unsavory herbs, or a few beans served with a little salt, save once a week he had a little meal put into it. His austerity of life was not suitable to the looser sort in that monastery, who were emulous of his virtues and impatient of rebuke; which the Man of God perceiving, he returned again to the Chapel of St. Hilda, where he was joyfully accepted of the matron. She presently set on workmen to build a place for the laying in of his corn and for other necessary uses.

This Man of God spent whole nights in watching and prayer; and when he slept, which was more for necessity than otherwise, he made the ground his bed. He had four servants, two whereof he employed about tillage, the third he kept for divers uses, and the fourth he commonly retained about himself to send abroad into the country to collect the people's alms for those poor brethren which he had taken into his company.

One day it chanced as St. Robert slept on the grass, being much wearied with his continual austereness, his mother being lately dead, appeared unto him very sad, pale, and deformed, telling him that for usury and divers other transgressions she was judged to most grievous pains unless he relieved her by his prayers, which St. Robert promised to perform. Being greatly troubled for the discomfort of his mother, he went unto prayer; and not long after his mother appeared to him again with a cheerful aspect, giving thanks to her son, and departed and praised God eternally.

Not long after this, William Stuteville, Lord of the forest, passing his cell, demanded of his servants, Who lived there? they answered, One Robert, an holy hermit. No, answered Stuteville, rather a receiver of thieves; and in a distempered manner commanded his followers to level it with the ground, which was done accordingly. Then Robert removed to a place near the town of Knaresborough, where he had before remained, contriving no better a dwelling than only a small receptacle by the Chapel of St. Giles, made up with the boughs of trees. The holy man still increasing in virtue and godliness, made the enemy of man more desirous of his overthrow, and thought once again, by his former means, to disquiet his virtuous endeavours. Stuteville, a fit instrument for such a purpose, coming that way, by the instigation of the devil, took notice of a smoke that ascended from Robert's cell, and demanded, Who lived there? Answer was made by his servants, Robert the Hermit. Is it Robert, quoth he, whom I overthrew and expelled my forest? Answer was made, The same; whereat enraged, he swore ——— to raze it to the ground, and expel Robert the next day from his mansion-house for ever. But in the night in his sleep, there appeared unto him in a vision three men terrible and fearful to

behold, whereof two carried a burning engine of iron beset with sharp and fiery teeth; the third of a giant-like stature, holding two iron clubs in his hands, came furiously towards his bed, saying, "Cruel prince, and instrument of the devil, rise quickly and make choice of one of these to defend thyself for the injuries thou intendest against the Man of God, for whom I am sent hither to fight with thee!"

Hereupon Stuteville cried out, and with remorse of conscience cried to God for mercy, with protestations of amendment, whereat the fearful vision vanished. Stuteville coming to himself, presently construed that this revelation was sent from God, for the violence done and intended against St. Robert his servant. Wherefore the next day he conferred all the lands between his cell and Grimbald-Craig-Stone for a perpetual alms: and that the ground should not lie untilled, he gave him two oxen, two horses, and two kine. Not long after Robert took into his company a Jew, whom he employed as overseer of the poor and distributer of their alms. One day the Jew, being overcome by the devil, fled away from the holy man, and in his flight fell and broke his leg; which the holy man understanding, (by revelation) made haste to him, and chiding him for his fault, which the Jew acknowledged and desired pardon, forthwith Robert blessing his leg, all embued in blood, with his holy hand, restored him to his former state, and brought him back to his cell.

Robert's care of the poor was great; and, that he might the better relieve their wants he desired his patron Stuteville to bestow a cow on him, which was granted; but withal such a cow, so wild and fierce, that none durst come near her. The Man of God making haste to the forest, found her, and embracing her about the neck, brought her home as meek as a

lamb, to the great amazement of the spectators. One of Stuteville's servants told his master of this thing, and withal said, he would devise a way how to get the cow again from Robert. But his Master did not approve of this motion; nevertheless the fellow, with counterfeit looks and gesture, framing himself lame both of hands and feet, encountered Robert and desired some relief for his wife and children, who were miserably oppressed with hunger and want, unto whom Robert gave his cow, saying unto him, "God gave and God shall have, but so shall thou be as thou makest thyself to be," and when this deceiver thought to depart with his cow, he was not able to stir, but was lame indeed. Perceiving this to be the just judgment of God for deluding his servant, he cried out, "Robert, true servant of God, pardon my trespass and the injury I have done unto you," which the indulgent and good old father instantly did, restoring him to his former ability, and returned into his cell, where he was received with joy.

A company of deer from the forest haunted his ground, and spoiled his corn, doing him much harm, whereof he complained to his Patron, requiring some order to be taken therein. To whom his Patron thus replied, "Robert, I give thee free leave to impound these deer, and to detain them till thou art satisfied." Whereupon the holy man went into the fields, and with a little rod drove the deer out of the corn like lambs, and shut them up in his barn. Which done, Robert went back to his Patron acquainting him therewith, desiring him withal to loose the said deer. His Patron answered, that "Robert had leave freely to use the deer so impounded in the plough, or in any other service of husbandry," for which Robert returned him many thanks, and went back to his cell. And taking the deer out of

the barn he put them under the yoke to plough, and made them every day to plough his ground like oxen, which was daily seen and admired by all.

King John coming that way, and hearing such renown of Robert's sanctity, was pleased to visit him at his poor cell, and conferred upon that place as much of his waste wood next adjoining as he could convert to tillage with one plough or team. This servant of God told Lord Bryon that came for his benediction, and to know what good or evil success he should have in a voyage he was to take upon the King's service, that he should effect his business, and bring his occasions to a good period; but withal that he should never return.

Not long after he foretold that presently after his death the Monks of Fountains Abbey would with force strive to take his body with them. He willed them of his house to resist, if need were, with secular power; willing that his body should there rest, where he gave up his last breath; which was done and effected accordingly. The holy man, perceiving himself to draw towards his end, commanded the blessed sacrament to be brought unto him, preparing to die with an holy and humble heart,

At which time the Monks of Fountains, hearing of his near approaching end, made haste to come unto him, bringing their habit, wherein his body was to be vested and interred. To whom he told, his own ordinary garment was enough, neither desired he any other.

As he lay at the point of death, the Jew with his fellows came weeping before him and desired his last blessing, which he willingly gave them; and in that exercise yielded up the ghost. His body was with due reverence made ready for the grave, and the bruit being divulged abroad, the Monks of Fountains

came and gave him their habit, which he refused whilst he lived, endeavouring to carry away his body by force; but a company of armed men from the castle resisted them, who returned home sad for so great a loss.

In conclusion, he was buried in the Chapel of Holy-Cross, in a new tomb. There came to honour his obsequies great multitudes of all sorts of people, kissing the coffin wherein his body was inclosed.

On one side the entrance, into the Chapel of St. Robert under a shade of spreading ivy, is the figure of a Knight Templar, cut in the rock, in the act of drawing his sword to defend the place from the violence of rude intruders.

The Chapel is elegantly hollowed out of the solid rock, its roof and altar beautifully adorned with Gothic ornaments; behind the altar is a large niche, where formerly stood an image; and on each side of it is a place for the Holy Water Bason: Here are also the figures of three heads designed, as is supposed, for an emblematical allusion to the order of the Monks of the once neighbouring priory, by some of whom they were probably cut; the order was styled Sanctæ Trinitatis. At some distance is another head, said to represent that of John the Baptist, to whom this Chapel is said to have been dedicated. In the floor is a cavity where formerly some antient relic was deposited.

The Chapel is ten feet six inches long, nine feet wide, and seven feet six inches high.

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